RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS

FOR THE HOME

PARSHAS KI SISA

MOTIVATING TO DO MORE

The importance of feeling and showing appreciation for others is something that is often underestimated. People have been finding it hard to show appreciation for a very long time, as the Chasam Sofer illustrates from a *passuk* in this week's *parshah*: "*Vehayah ketzais Moshe el ha'ohel yakumu kol ha'am* — And when Moshe went out to the Ohel, the entire nation would rise." The Chasam Sofer notes that people often speak in a disparaging manner about the leader of their community — until he leaves, when suddenly they can find all kinds of positive things to say about him.

This concept is often illustrated using the names of the *parshiyos: Tazria, Metzora, Acharei Mos, Kedoshim* and *Emor*. "Tazria," when a person is born and alive, "Metzora," we don't say such nice things about them. It's only "Acharei Mos," after they die, that "Kedoshim Emor," we say how holy they were. And this was true even of Moshe Rabbeinu, who suffered a great deal of criticism while he was among the Jews, teaching and ruling them. Only later, when the *Amud Anan* came down, separating him from the people and Moshe was accorded honor from Hashem, did the people "rise" and admit his greatness.

This is how people are. All too often, we don't appreciate people or even acknowledge the positive in them, until we *chas v"shalom* lose them. It's not uncommon for a person who just lost his or her spouse to say that the thing they regret most is not expressing appreciation to the spouse when they were still around to hear it.

Somehow, it doesn't work the other way around. When the person's still with us, we don't delay mentioning all the things we're not happy about. We think we'll have time to mention the positive later. But sometimes, later is too late.

A similar problem is when we do say nice things about our loved ones, but only to a third party. There can be many reasons for this, but in general, if you find yourself saying something nice about your spouse to someone else, stop for a moment and try to remember when the last time was that you told it to your spouse directly.

Not long ago, someone told me that his wife had been chatting with her sister, who was complaining about how unhelpful her husband was. The man's wife responded that she would never be able to handle that, so it was a good thing that her husband helps so much. This man told me that this second-hand compliment was the first time in years of marriage that his wife had mentioned how much he helps at home. He had always assumed that she barely noticed.

Almost any type of compliment is better than none at all, but saying it directly could make a huge amount of difference. If you can turn things around and start giving compliments directly, you might be surprised about how well your spouse takes the occasional complaint.

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QUESTION

DEAR RABBI GRUEN,

I really enjoy listening to your speeches on TorahAnytime and I'm gaining a lot from them.

My husband is an amazing father to my children and the nicest husband anyone could ask for. He has sterling *middos* and I really appreciate everything he does. Here's the thing though: He's at a job where he's not making enough money for the bare basics! He loves his workmates and his job but we cannot make ends meet. I'm trying to do my part financially by working all I can and not spending money on things we don't need (and we don't even have all the necessities). I tried discussing the idea of him leaving his job and even had two ideas of better paying job openings I heard about, but as soon as I start talking about it, he becomes blank or just walks away. He's too comfortable at his job.

Thanks in advance for your help!

ANSWER

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN RESPONDS

First, I want to commend you for seeing the good in your husband. You have a husband who in your opinion isn't providing as he should and refuses to discuss it. Some people get stuck in situations like these and decide that they're dealing with someone unreasonable, or someone who doesn't care, and this overshadows all of the person's good qualities. You're seeing all the good in him and appreciating him despite the fact that there's something that bothers you, and it certainly is not to be taken for granted that he is a great husband and a good father.

With regard to the sore topic, I admire the fact that you can see the problem for what it is — he's too comfortable at work — rather than labeling your husband himself as the problem. If someone dismisses his spouse as "the problem," he becomes virtually incapable of dealing with the situation at all. I'm assuming that your husband is a basically responsible person who is experiencing difficulties in this particular issue, and with this perspective, we can go further. Based on the introduction to this essay, I would like to begin by stressing how important it is that you let your husband know how you feel about him, as you write. I don't know how often you tell him that you think he's an "amazing father" or "the nicest husband," but sometimes, just verbalizing your feelings could be the missing ingredient. If you don't tell him, often, how much you think of him, then the one time you complain about something is going to create the impression he receives — that this negative point is the sum total of how you view him. If you lay the compliments on "thick" and only then bring up your issue, it can make it easier for the person to hear what you have to say.

From your description of your husband's resistance, I also think it's possible that he lacks self-confidence, and while there are ways in which he may be able to work on this on his own, there's much you can do to help. Sometimes, people are unwilling to put in the extra effort and protest that they aren't responsible for helping others overcome their shortcomings or challenges. That may be true, but as a good wife, I think you'll see it as an opportunity and

a privilege to help your husband feel more confident and achieve better results in his personal life too.

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Before I continue to discuss how to successfully address this issue and obtain the desired results, I want to address any husband who thinks his wife could have sent in a similar question. Inasmuch as we all have *bitachon* that Hashem is the One Who supplies our every need, we are not supposed to wait for *parnassah* like *Mann* from heaven. In the *Kesubah*, a man undertakes to provide for his family, and this is his obligation. Trying is great, and sometimes it's all someone can do, but the obligation to provide remains. Of course if a person is doing all he can, working the hours he must and doing the right *hishtadlus*, and still *parnassah* isn't coming for some reason, that's when you say that it's in Hashem's Hands. But if a person isn't putting in the required effort (perhaps using *bitachon* as a crutch and excuse), he's not fulfilling his obligation.

Assessing the needs of a family accurately and agreeing on what the basics are is not always easy, and you may need an objective third party to help you settle this, but in general, if a person has a low-paying job and only works at it for a few hours a day, thereby not earning enough to meet his family's needs, he is not fulfilling his obligation. Before deciding on when to "rely" on *bitachon*, you should speak to your Rav to make sure you're going about things the right way. You can and should do this before your wife complains, because providing for your family is not voluntary.

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In this particular instance, the fact that your husband finds it difficult to talk about the issue seems to indicate that he doesn't feel great about himself and recognizes that something is wrong. If he wasn't concerned, he would have no problem giving a flippant answer.

When you approach things from this perspective, the next step is to make it clear that your intention isn't to make him feel bad (though you may be unable to prevent that from happening). Obviously if you know there's really nothing he can do about the situation, for whatever reason, then hurting his feelings and complaining isn't right. But otherwise, you shouldn't feel bad for wanting to cover the basics for your family. Don't feel guilty for trying to be a responsible mother and making sure your family has what they need. Addressing the issue in a healthy way is your responsibility, if you know that ignoring it means that your family will go without things they genuinely need. (The same would apply to a husband whose wife is not taking care of the basic needs of their children; if he fears hurting her feelings by speaking up, then he is essentially neglecting his children too.)

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When you do bring up anything unpleasant, in most cases it's not *what* you say, it's *how* you say it. There is a correct way to say virtually anything, and most often it depends on when and how. When you're standing at the register in the grocery or waiting for a taxi and your husband doesn't have money to give you, that's not the right time to bring up the issue of finances. And if you're feeling so frustrated that you're likely to be insulting or offensive, that's obviously also the wrong way to go about it. When you say the right thing at the right time, you have a much greater chance of seeing results.

The basic formula for approaching such issues begins with validation. Tell your husband you realize how hard it feels to leave his friends and comfort zone at work. The same would apply for any other reason that might be deterring someone from getting a better-paid job. When a person feels that you understand them, the discussion flows much better. They don't feel attacked; they sense that you're both on the same page.

The next step is to present the problem in technical, non-emotional terms. Here it would be: "We don't have the money we need." There's no need to mention obligations, commitments, or competence. Address the problem in objective terms — there are expenses that need to be covered.

Once you get to the stage of suggesting ideas to solve the problem, do so in a way that makes him feel good. Instead of telling him that it would be responsible to earn more, tell him that he's worth more. "A person with your talents should be better paid. You're being taken advantage of" (if you think that's the case). You can also try to reassure him: "I'm sure wherever you go you'll be well-liked and

will come to enjoy your job and the surroundings. You're such a nice person that everyone enjoys your company and likes working with you." He still may have a hard time leaving his job, but at least you're doing what you can to ease his way.

You shouldn't come across as apologetic for asking for this. Be clear that you're not telling him what to do, but do tell him that you really don't feel okay with what's happening. Be clear about your position and your feelings. "I'd love to make the grocery order but I can't if I don't have the money for it. What can we do about it?" You should clarify that your intention is to find a solution that works for both of you. Your husband doesn't need to do things exactly as you suggest. You can offer to discuss this with a third party if necessary, and if you go a step further and ask your husband to choose that person, you'll be demonstrating that you're motivated by your sense of responsibility for your family rather than, for instance, by wanting to be "proven right."

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I would like to mention one more important point, which I saved for the end. I don't know any more about this question than what is printed here, and my response is based on the details provided, taking them at face value, and nothing else. However, if the husband had a chance to respond, it could be that he would present a different picture.

There certainly are cases where a husband and wife are on totally different pages with regard to what "basics" are. There are also wives who suggest jobs for their husbands that are totally off-the-mark, just as there are husbands whose "solutions" for solving housekeeping issues (for example) are no solution at all.

It's also possible that previous attempts to discuss a situation deteriorated into heated arguments, so that when one spouse now tries to talk about it, the other one clams up or disappears, knowing that he or she won't be heard. In general it's important to question why someone would resist a conversation if there's nothing challenging or personal about it — and this is also why it's so important to make sure the issue is presented correctly.

Recently, I received a long letter from someone complaining about their spouse. I felt there was part of the story missing, so I replied that I would address the question only after the person let me know how their spouse might be seeing the situation. There was no follow-up.

Sometimes, we don't like to acknowledge that there's another way of seeing things. It could be that your husband is partially at fault for not expressing his perspective, but it's still important to question whether you are also at fault for not acknowledging his feelings in the past, and that this may be part of the reason why he's shutting down.

Regardless of what your or your husband may have done wrong in the past, however, going forward, a great deal of progress can be made once you know not only *what* to say but also *how* to say it.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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Thank You & Tizku Lmitzvos!